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Superpower Relations, Backchannels, and the Subcontinent

By Luke A. Nichter and Richard A. Moss

Ehrlichman: And the India-Pakistan thing in that larger canvas is really not understood by the average guy to be all that important. It's a bunch of—
Nixon: Unwashed heathen. They're picking away at each other over there.
Ehrlichman: Either side would have been the wrong side.

—December 24, 1971¹

Kissinger: Mr. President, by next October people will say: "What India-Pakistan crisis?"...When the history is written, this will look like one of our better maneuvers.

—March 31, 1972²

In his 1978 memoir, President Richard M. Nixon claimed, "By using diplomatic signals and behind-the-scenes pressures we had been able to save West Pakistan from the imminent threat of Indian aggression and domination. We had also once again avoided a major confrontation with the Soviet Union."³ Kissinger's far more detailed chapter on "the tilt," in the first volume of his memoirs, *White House Years*, complements and largely corroborates Nixon's.⁴ Kissinger argued that Nixon did not want to "squeeze" Pakistani President Agha "Yahya" Khan, and tried to put forward a neutral posture to the bloodshed in East Pakistan that was initially triggered by a series of natural disasters.⁵ Kissinger also contended that Nixon did not want to encourage secessionist elements within an ally, Pakistan, which was divided into two wings—East and West—over 1,000 miles apart astride its hostile neighbor, India. Above all, before his secret trip to China in July 1971, Kissinger wanted to preserve the special channel to the People's Republic of China (PRC), and he saw three obstacles to handling the situation in South Asia: "the policy of India, our own public debate, and the indiscipline of our bureaucracy."⁶ Kissinger stressed that the US attempted to restrain India by making clear American opposition to Indo-Pakistani conflict and attempting to enlist Soviet assistance with their ally, India, towards the same goal. Nevertheless, the two South Asian countries marched towards conflict following a cyclone in November 1970, the resulting devastation and

flooding in East Pakistan, Yahya's election loss to pro-Bangladeshi independence politician Mujib Rahman in December 1970, and Yahya's subsequent crackdown of "Operation Searchlight" in East Pakistan against Bangladeshi independence in March 1971. The environmental and political upheaval caused an unprecedented refugee crisis as Bengalis fled from East Pakistan into India and, with Indian backing, organized an independent government-in-exile and resistance movement.

The August 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on the heels of Kissinger's groundbreaking trip to China was, in Kissinger's view, a particular cause for alarm because it "was deliberately steering nonaligned India toward a de facto alliance with the Soviet Union" and enabled India to take an uncompromising stance against the instability in Pakistan.⁷ Kissinger faulted Indian intransigence, interference in East Pakistan, and a refusal to negotiate on substantive matters, rather than Pakistani provocations, as the precipitating causes of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. Kissinger also believed the crisis had been solved at the edge of an abyss by the various messages sent through confidential channels (including the White House-Kremlin "Hot Line") and diplomatic channels to the Soviet Union, which allegedly led to the Indian acceptance of a ceasefire and the preservation of West Pakistan at Soviet behest. Kissinger maintained that Indian restraint on attacking West Pakistan was, in no doubt, due to "a reluctant decision resulting from Soviet pressure, which in turn grew out of American insistence, including the fleet movement and the willingness to risk the [May 1972 Moscow] summit."⁸

In the face of the President's and National Security Advisor's memoirs, however, nearly every other account of the US response to the South Asian crisis has faulted the Nixon administration for its handling of the crisis, for its "tilt" to the dictatorial and arguably genocidal regime of Yahya Khan, its anti-Indian bias, its distorted reading of intelligence, and its claim that the US "saved" West Pakistan by challenging India and the Soviet Union. Critics have further charged that Nixon acted recklessly by sending Task Force 74, a flotilla led by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise*, to the Indian Ocean at the height of the war, thereby exacerbating tensions and risking broader conflict between competing alliances: India and the Soviet Union on one side; the US, the PRC, and Pakistan on the other.⁹

The charges levied by critics trace their origin to investigative journalist Jack Anderson's Pulitzer-Prize-winning syndicated columns in December 1971 - January 1972 that documented the Nixon administration's "tilt" towards Pakistan. Anderson's exposé was based on a selection of sensitive, high level, leaked documents he had obtained from the executive branch and the military. The most damaging sources Anderson obtained came from the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG), the National Security Council-based policy body that addressed the South

Asian crisis. In his 1973 book, *The Anderson Papers*, which further expanded the critique of the Nixon-Kissinger South Asia policy, the journalist charged, “Richard Nixon brought the United States to the edge of another world war. His actions were deliberate; he operated in secret; and he lied to the American people about his actions.”¹⁰

Those critical of Nixon’s policy have dominated the historiography of the episode on the Subcontinent and have largely followed Anderson’s groundbreaking work, adding new insights based on documentary evidence as it became available over the last four decades. The critics range from ex-State Department officials, such as Christopher Van Hollen and William Bundy, to memoirists, like former Soviet Ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin and Indian Foreign Secretary T. N. Kaul, to journalists, biographers, and historians. Kissinger-biographers number among the critics and include investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, *Time* magazine editor Walter Isaacson, and Finnish scholar Jussi Hanhimäki. Perhaps the best sourced examination focusing on the South Asian episode is the work of historian Robert McMahon, who has based his scholarship on excellent edited volumes produced by F. S. Aijazuddin and Roedad Khan, in addition to two volumes of official documentary series *Foreign Relations of the United States* produced by the State Department.¹¹

Yet, despite the preponderance of rich documentary sources, there is still material that has been hitherto untapped. To bridge the gap between the Nixon administration’s perceptions and policy responses to the South Asian crisis and war of 1971, this article uses Nixon tapes material that has never been published, in addition to the recently declassified high level US-Soviet “backchannel” exchanges. The tapes provide the candid assessments by Nixon, Kissinger and other policymakers as events were reported across the executive offices, with moments of excitement, disappointment, and a range of emotions expressed in raw, uncensored language.¹² In contrast to the unpolished nature of the tapes, the published US and Soviet backchannel exchanges show the direct, written communications between the White House and the Kremlin in the lead-up to and during the short Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. Soon after Nixon assumed office in 1969, Kissinger, on the President’s behalf, met privately with the Soviet Ambassador to the US, Anatoly Dobrynin, and conducted a candid exchange of views that grew to encompass all major issues in superpower relations over the following years. The US Department of State and the Russian Foreign Ministry jointly compiled, translated, annotated, and published nearly the entire record—over one thousand pages—in *US-Soviet Relations in the Era of Détente, 1969-1972*. This unique collection provides an invaluable snapshot into these important meetings between US and Soviet interlocutors, a record that was long shrouded in secrecy.¹³

Utilizing these new materials, we argue that the Nixon administration's handling of the crisis on the Subcontinent was neither the abject failure as depicted by critics, nor was it the success that Nixon and Kissinger presented in their memoirs. In fact, this article reaches conclusions midway between the administration and its critics. The picture of the White House response to the crisis reveals that although Nixon and Kissinger superimposed a Cold War distortion on a regional situation, they responded logically. The Nixon administration steadily escalated diplomatic signals and the top policymakers sincerely believed that India had launched external aggression—not Pakistan—with its support for Mukhti Bahini (liberation force) raids into what was then East Pakistan.

Several additional themes run through the narrative of this article, many of which were also reflected in US-Soviet backchannel communications and in the taped conversations. Not surprisingly, Nixon and Kissinger's policy perceptions were clearly colored by their personal experiences with Indira Gandhi and Yahya Khan. The White House was unwilling to dismiss Yahya's role as an honest broker in Sino-American rapprochement and likewise saw duplicity on the part of Indira Gandhi after she visited Washington, DC in early November 1971 and claimed that India had no desire for war with Pakistan. Additionally, the surreptitiously recorded conversations between the President and his advisers, a portion of the 3,700-hour collection of Nixon tapes, are rife with gendered speech and appeals to masculine "toughness" that colored Nixon's actions. Significantly, the frequent contact with the Soviets during the war mitigates some of the criticism of recklessness.

The tapes and communications with the Soviets also demonstrate that Nixon and Kissinger believed that the war started on November 21, 1971, in contrast to the date most often cited as the start of the war, December 3, 1971, when Pakistan attacked forward Indian airbases. The tapes and backchannel records show that Nixon and Kissinger certainly believed in November-December 1971 that an Indian attack could result in the "dismemberment" and Balkanization of West Pakistan, regardless if the impression came from a misreading of intelligence. The Nixon administration attempted to spin the stories on the war to downplay American involvement on Pakistan's behalf, and due to the reliance on backchannel diplomacy, it is understandable that the administration's actions were criticized at the time and afterwards for the dichotomy between the public and private lines. Lastly, the experience of the Nixon White House during the South Asian crisis reinforced the belief in the White House that the Soviets would attempt to gain at American expense and that the administration would need to take a hard line to bring the Soviets into line.

Unfortunately, the focus on the US and Soviet materials is illuminating but cannot comprehensively address the multifaceted 1971 South Asian crisis and war because the situation on the ground outpaced Washington's and Moscow's efforts

to manage the crisis at the time. Until high level Indian materials, Indo-Soviet exchanges, Soviet Politburo meetings and other sources become available—if ever—the Pakistani, Soviet, and Indian sides of the story will remain incomplete. In the interim, a more nuanced understanding of US policy will need to suffice.

Backchannels and the Indo-Pakistani War

The Indo-Pakistani war was the quintessential example of a regional conflict projected onto the backdrop of perceived superpower conflict and foreign policy managed from the White House. Nixon and Kissinger directed policy during the crisis but used the State Department to send messages through official channels and to build a public relations case for action in the UN.¹⁴ The policies partially grew out of inherent distrust for the “bureaucracy” at the State Department, but Nixon and Kissinger still relied on higher level Department officials, such as Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs Joseph Sisco. Although the US response was more complex than either supporters or detractors have argued, it is clear that the administration used backchannels to convey their desire to use Soviet influence to contain the Indians and to contain the potential risks of the regional conflict expanding into a superpower conflict due to entangling alliances and obligations.

The White House initially believed that India wanted to avoid conflict and argued for several months that the US and the Soviet Union had “parallel interests” in trying to prevent an Indo-Pakistani war. At the same time, American policymakers realistically recognized that a refugee crisis could be the first step down the road to conflict.¹⁵ The theme of “parallel interests” also entered into the Kissinger-Dobrynin backchannel. For example, at Nixon’s request, Kissinger invited Dobrynin to the presidential retreat at Camp David on June 10, 1971, for a *tour d’horizon* of US-Soviet relations.¹⁶ Dobrynin reported back to Moscow that, with regard to the brewing Indo-Pakistani crisis, Kissinger claimed that Washington had “reliable information” that India “has still not rejected the idea of providing armed assistance to East Pakistan.”¹⁷

Before departing on his secret trip to China, Kissinger informed Dobrynin that he had been instructed by President Nixon to “visit Delhi and confidentially, but in the strongest terms, call Indira Gandhi’s attention to the fact that the US takes a very serious view of this dangerous Indian course of action and the serious consequences associated with it.” In the event of an Indo-Pakistani war, Kissinger warned that the US would “cut off all future economic aid to India.” Dobrynin reported back to the Kremlin: “In short, Kissinger summarized, the US Government is for maintaining the territorial status quo between India and Pakistan while at

the same time seeking a political solution to the problems that have arisen.” Once again, Kissinger had stressed the parallel interests of the US and the USSR, and “made it clear that the President [considered] the confidential exchange of views on this matter between him and the Soviet leadership to be useful,” and it would “revisit this issue” after Kissinger’s return from Asia.¹⁸

In response to the US opening to China, announced by President Nixon in a nationwide televised address on July 15, 1971, India took the diplomatic initiative by tilting toward the Soviet Union, taking out an insurance policy of sorts. Dusting off a treaty that had been negotiated but never concluded, Indian Ambassador to the USSR and close associate of Indira Gandhi, D. P. Dhar, traveled to Moscow in late July 1971 and quickly concluded the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation on August 9th.¹⁹ This development signified the first shift in the Soviet position on the crisis away from US-Soviet “parallel interests.” Indo-Soviet collusion expanded and was, perhaps, an unintended consequence of US geopolitical paradigm shift towards China, in addition to being a brilliant Indian *Realpolitik* counterpunch to the Pakistani channels Nixon and Kissinger had used to open China.

On the morning of August 9, 1971, Kissinger informed the President about the Indo-Soviet treaty. Nixon inadvertently raised the subject by noting from his morning news summary that he had seen that “Gromyko was down there talking to that damned Indian Foreign Minister [Swaran Singh].” Kissinger replied that the Soviet Union and India had just signed the 25-year treaty and explained that the Indians and the Soviets would “consult with each other in case of aggression of other countries against one of the parties.” Talking with a sense of bravado, Kissinger promised, “to give that Indian Ambassador [to the US, L.K. Jha] unshirted hell.” Audibly angry, Nixon replied, “And the thing is, though, they [the Indians] should well understand if they’re going to choose to go with the Russians, they’re choosing not to go with us.” The President added, “Now, Goddamnit, they’ve got to know this...Goddamnit, who’s giving them a billion dollars a year? Shit, the Russians aren’t giving them a billion dollars a year, Henry.” Kissinger suggested that the response to India and the Soviet Union be handled in the National Security Council, i.e. from the White House and via private channels:

Kissinger: Bureaucratically I am going—we have to keep this in the NSC system because—

Nixon: Hell yes.

Kissinger: —while the combination of Bill [Rogers] and [Joe] Sisco is going to be hip-shooting all over the place if they do it alone, and all on the Indian side because they’re very influenced, as you know, by *The Washing-*

ton Post and *New York Times*. So far—

Nixon: [Sighs]

Kissinger: —I've—Bill has, has been fine. But now that Sisco is back—

Nixon: He's going up to New York, is he?

Kissinger: Yeah. Well, I don't mind. I think it's good for him to do the relief—

Nixon: That's on the refugees—

Kissinger: As long it's relief, but all the briefing papers he gets—Every time he listens to his own bureaucracy, he's in trouble because all of them are pro-Indian, all of them are—are really Kennedyites...²⁰

As the conversation progressed, Kissinger elucidated the practice of triangular diplomacy and directly linked the policy of improved relations with the Soviet Union through a potential summit meeting to the US opening to China, the simmering Arab-Israeli dispute, and the situation on the Subcontinent. Kissinger believed that the fear of Sino-American collusion would keep the Soviets in line, and the prospect of a summit meeting and the concurrent agreements that would be signed in Moscow could help delay another war in the Middle East and force the Soviets to restrain the Indians and avert war on the Subcontinent:

Kissinger: But their major reason is they're afraid of what you will do in Peking if they're in a posture of hostility to you. So they would like to have the visit hanging over Peking. They would like that you have the visit in the pocket—

Nixon: I see.

Kissinger: So that you will not—So that you will be restrained in Peking. We, in turn, want it because it's helpful to us to have Moscow hanging over Peking. It reinsures...the Peking visit. And, after all, when I handed your letter to Dobrynin, I didn't even mention the summit. He said, "Does the fact that there is no summit in there mean the President has lost interest?" He said, "Because I can tell you unofficially they are considering it now at the highest level in Moscow and there'll be an answer." And he said... speaking for himself—"they're not letting me go on vacation is because they want me to transmit that answer, that proposal."

Nixon: Hmm. Well, either way, we shall see.

Kissinger: ...And for us...then we'd be in great shape. Because if the summit is coming up, say, in the middle of May [1972] in Moscow, we'd know there won't be a Middle East blowup before then, because they'll sit on the Egyptians.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: That and India is—are the two big problems.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: That means we'll be through the better part of next year, and they can't start something up right after the summit, either.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: And we can keep the two to control each other.²¹

When Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko visited Washington in early September, the situation in South Asia was discussed within the broader context of superpower relations.²² Nixon told Gromyko that he feared the situation in the Subcontinent could “explode into war in the area.” Gromyko responded that the Soviet Government also wanted to “prevent a confrontation” and that Moscow had shared its policy with Mrs. Gandhi. Despite New Delhi’s protestations to the Kremlin that it wanted to avoid war, Gromyko noted that the Soviet leadership “did not have as much confidence as in the case of the Indian leadership.” Furthermore, Gromyko “was gratified to know” that Soviet and US policies in averting war were in line and that both “stood on the position of counseling both sides to exercise restraint.” Nixon told the Soviet Foreign Minister that the two would “be in touch with each other on this situation.”²³ Nixon also reminded Gromyko of the importance of using the backchannel: “I do not take charge of things that don’t matter. Where they matter, like between our countries, then I make the decisions.” The President emphasized, “We couldn’t have done it without that channel.”²⁴

By late October, as a result of the Indo-Soviet treaty and several high-level trips between Soviet and Indian diplomatic, political, and military officials, Soviet attitudes began to change from agreement with American pronouncements about restraint and averting war towards a sharper criticism of Pakistani actions. As two scholars of the Indo-Pakistani conflict have noted, “the total shift in Moscow’s position on ‘Bangladesh’ occurred only after Mrs. Gandhi’s visit to Moscow from 27 to 29 September.”²⁵ The change in Soviet attitude did not go unnoticed in American policymaking circles and entered into the various US-Soviet channels amidst multifaceted discussions of summit planning, the Middle East, trade, and other areas of US-Soviet relations. The White House increasingly saw the Soviet Union as an enabler of Indian aggression, a pattern that also fit with the perceptions of the Soviet Union enabling North Vietnamese intransigence by supplying materiel. As the pattern became clear, Nixon and Kissinger felt that the US would have to risk détente, and mild protests gave way to vigorous protests that the Soviet response to American wishes during the Indo-Pakistani war could be a “watershed” in US-Soviet relations.

At the beginning of November, Indira Gandhi visited Washington to press India's case and explain the dire nature of the refugee crisis. Presidential scholar Robert Dallek correctly called the "two conversations on November 4 and 5... case studies in heads of state speaking past each other."²⁶ It is more likely, however, that Nixon and Gandhi had already made up their minds long before they met in the Oval Office that autumn. Nixon believed that India wanted to confront Pakistan and underlined the potential consequences: American aid to India would be cut off, and the American people would not understand aggressive action. Gandhi knew that Nixon would not take India's side and had already calculated that the consequences would short-lived.²⁷ The November 4th conversation featured Kissinger doing most of the talking, while the conversation on November 5th was one of Nixon's foreign policy assessments, with Kissinger adding some important details on Southeast Asia, and, particularly, the Peking initiative to assuage Indian concerns.²⁸

Most accounts of the Indo-Pakistani conflict, particularly those which have examined the American response, have either ignored or downplayed the events of late-November 1971 and have dated the start of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 to the Pakistani Air Force's December 3, 1971, raid on airbases in northwestern India.²⁹ The perception that India was going to go to war against Pakistan was fairly well established in the wake of Gandhi's trip to Washington, nearly a month before Yahya commenced the air raid. American policymakers were kept well apprised of events on the ground by their connections to the Pakistani leadership and knew of Mukti Bahini attacks into East Pakistan with the support of regular Indian armor, artillery, and infantry.³⁰ Kissinger-biographer Walter Isaacson wrote, "On November 22, when India conducted a cross-border operation into East Pakistan in support of Bengali separatists, Kissinger was one of the few (then or in retrospect) who considered this incident the start of full-scale war." Isaacson continued, "The State Department, on the other hand, downplayed the seriousness of these skirmishes; even Pakistan's President Yahya Khan cabled the next day to say he still hoped a war could be avoided."³¹

Although the point about "full scale" war may be accurate, the broader argument missed several important factors, including: the State Department was receiving contradictory reports from both Pakistan and India; as demonstrated in several secretly taped conversations, Nixon and Kissinger genuinely believed that India had started the war by supporting Mukti Bahini forces with regular Indian troops on Pakistani territory; and, most importantly, the simple fact of the situation on the ground was that Indian regular forces had violated Pakistan's border in support of insurgents who were both trained and supplied by India. As Richard Sisson and Leo Rose noted in their landmark study on the conflict, published before Isaacson's biography of Kissinger, "because of the air strikes, Pakistan is often

depicted as having taken the initiative in starting the war. In more realistic, rather than formal, terms, however, the war began on 21 November, when Indian military units occupied Pakistani territory as part of the preliminary phase to the offensive directed at capturing and liberating Dhaka.”³²

As reports of the number and severity of border skirmishes increased, Kissinger convened the interagency WSAG to develop a response. Kissinger’s planned response of going to the UN—minus the factor of the US-Soviet backchannels, which was unbeknownst to most of the group’s members—developed largely out of the assessment by the State Department’s Joseph Sisco. Sisco told Kissinger:

In the present circumstances, where we do not have an all-out war but do have a significant increase in the numbers of incidents, we could try to get some form of restraining order from the Security Council which hopefully would arrest or slow down further deterioration of the situation... We obviously need facts. But I think we know enough about the nature of the insurgency to believe it would be a good thing to begin to move our efforts somewhat more into the public domain and to begin to place some of the responsibility on the shoulders of the UN.³³

On November 22, 1971, American policymakers certainly believed that there had been a major incident and that India had attacked Pakistan by Mukti Bahini proxy. Kissinger called Nixon at 12:45 p.m. and said, “There is no doubt there is a large encroachment taking place and it is heavily backed by the Indians.”³⁴ In a memo later that day, Kissinger relayed Pakistani radio broadcasts of an Indian offensive and added, “we have no independent evidence but it seems apparent that there has been a major incident.”³⁵ In a never-before-published transcript of Oval Office meeting with the President that afternoon, after continued reports were coming in through regular cable traffic and via backchannels, Kissinger answered Nixon’s queries about the situation on the Subcontinent:

Nixon: Is Yahya saying it’s war or not?

Kissinger: Yeah, they’re saying it’s war.

Nixon: And the Indians say it isn’t?

Kissinger: It isn’t. That’s right. It’s a naked case of aggression, Mr. President ...

Nixon: Goddamnit, maybe we ought to say that.

Kissinger still hoped that war could be averted, despite the ‘naked case of Indian aggression,’ but the threshold had been crossed. As an overall strategy,

Kissinger endorsed the idea of coordinated action with the PRC in the UN Security Council. Kissinger suggested: “we ought to talk to—which I’ll do tomorrow night³⁶—to the Chinese to find out what they’ll do at the Security Council...we don’t have to go as far as the Chinese, but I would lean—” Nixon interrupted: “I want to go damn near as far. Now, understand: I don’t like the Indians.” Kissinger responded, “We ought to lean pretty close to the Chinese and make it an international [action]” but was again interrupted. Nixon repeated his theme: “Let’s remember the Pakistanis have been our friends...and the damn Indians have not been. You know?”³⁷ Kissinger hoped to coordinate with the Chinese and other powers in order to diplomatically isolate India and its Soviet Bloc supporters.

At Kissinger’s suggestion and with Nixon’s approval, the State Department sent a demarche to PM Gandhi on November 27th. To the Indians, the note said, “Military engagements along India’s border with East Pakistan have increased in number and strength. Tanks, aircraft and regular forces have been involved on both sides.”³⁸ The message to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev was similar and explicit: “The recent border incidents...in the Jessore section of East Pakistan have been of particular concern to me, as I am sure they have been to you...there appears to be an imminent danger of full-scale hostilities between India and Pakistan.”³⁹ Despite the Nixon administration’s best efforts to deescalate the situation, decisions in New Delhi and Islamabad had been made and the war was a foregone conclusion by late November. India had thrown down the gauntlet, and the fatalistic Pakistani leader decided to pick it up with a bungled attempt to take out Indian forward airbases on December 3rd.⁴⁰

Nixon and Kissinger decided to fight the battle in the UN, in allegiance with Communist China, and to make the Indo-Pakistani war a litmus test in US-Soviet relations. Kissinger and, particularly, Nixon were disinclined to believe the Indian side of the story and instead trusted the Pakistanis. From the vantage point of the Oval Office, Yahya had served as an honest broker in opening China and had accepted American recommendations for a peaceful resolution of the crisis—despite, as they saw them, exaggerated reports of his domestic strong-arm tactics. Nixon and Kissinger, at the same time, believed that Gandhi had moved away from two decades of Indian non-alignment and had allied the world’s most populous democracy with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, they believed she had lied to them during her trip to Washington. For the Nixon White House, the unanswered questions included the status of West Pakistan and whether or not it would be Balkanized, the fate of Kashmir, and whether or not East Pakistan would gain independence, become part of India, or some combination thereof.

Kissinger called Nixon on the morning of December 3rd to inform him “that West Pakistan has attacked because situation in East collapsing.” As for the Paki-

stani attack on India, Nixon saw it akin to “Russia claiming to be attacked by Finland.”⁴¹ Immediately responding to the news, Kissinger convened an emergency meeting of the WSAG.⁴² CIA Director Richard Helms confirmed that the Pakistanis had attacked the Indians, an act, the group largely agreed, likely provoked by Indian actions over the preceding two weeks, although confirming intelligence was not available.⁴³

Despite the onset of hostilities, the US-Soviet backchannel dialogue on the war itself, handled via Soviet *chargé d'affaires* Yuly Vorontsov (since Dobrynin had been recalled to Moscow for instructions), did not commence in earnest until the afternoon of December 5, 1971. Kissinger informed the President that the American efforts for a ceasefire and withdrawal had the support of the Chinese, and only Russia and Poland had opposed the efforts. Kissinger was displeased with the Soviet behavior and told Nixon, “Now, what the Russians this morning have launched is a blistering attack on Pakistan in TASS and in effect, have warned China against getting involved. What we are seeing here is a Soviet-Indian power play to humiliate the Chinese and also somewhat us.” If the US failed to support Pakistan, Kissinger warned, “if we collapse now, the Soviets won’t respect us for it; the Chinese will despise us and the other countries will draw their conclusions.”⁴⁴

Kissinger then directed NSC staffer Helmut Sonnenfeldt to draft a telegram and ordered Haig to prepare talking points according to the President’s telephone instructions, in preparation for a meeting with Vorontsov at 4:00 p.m. on December 5th. As scheduled, Kissinger met with Vorontsov in the Map Room at the White House. Kissinger told the DCM that “A letter for the General Secretary would be delivered the next day, but in view of the urgency of the situation, the President wanted it transmitted to Moscow immediately.” At a time of improving relations, Kissinger continued, “The President did not understand how the Soviet Union could believe that it was possible to work on the broad amelioration of our relationships while at the same time encouraging the Indian military aggression against Pakistan.” The President believed that Indian ‘aggression’ in instigating armed conflict with Pakistan violated the established order and the UN charter, and wondered why “a member country of the United Nations was being dismembered by the military forces of another member country which had close relationships with the Soviet Union.”⁴⁵

The next day, Kissinger had Nixon’s formal letter delivered to Vorontsov at the Soviet Embassy, but not via “usual channels.”⁴⁶ Still hoping to move from confrontation to cooperation, Nixon wrote Brezhnev that it was his understanding from his September meeting with Gromyko that the US and Soviet Union were “entering a new period in our relations which would be marked by mutual restraint and in which neither you nor we would act in crises to seek unilateral advantages.” Soviet

support of “the Indian Government’s open use of force against the independence and integrity of Pakistan, merely serves to aggravate an already grave situation,” Nixon warned. The only solution, in the president’s determination, was that “Urgent action is required and I believe that your great influence in New Delhi should serve these ends.”⁴⁷

Vorontsov met with Kissinger at 11:00 p.m. to personally deliver Brezhnev’s equally firm reply. According to Vorontsov, Brezhnev argued that the root cause of the conflict was the “result of actions of the Pakistani government against the population of East Pakistan” and that the Soviet Union desired “a political settlement in East Pakistan on the basis of respect for the will of its population as clearly expressed in the December 1970 elections.” In Brezhnev’s mind, the US did not act “actively enough and precisely enough...towards removing the main source of tension in relations between Pakistan and India.” Brezhnev vigorously disputed Nixon’s argument that the India-Pakistan crisis would be a watershed in US-Soviet relations:

Differences in the appraisal of specific events in the world...may arise, and there is nothing unnatural in that. However, if in such cases, instead of business-like search for realistic solutions, to start talking about a “critical stage” or “watershed” in Soviet-American relations, it would hardly help finding such solutions, and would make it still harder to envisage that it will facilitate improvement of Soviet-American relations and their stability.⁴⁸

In the face of Soviet pushback, Nixon took an even harder line with the Soviets and used additional signals, some public and some private, to reiterate the importance of preserving West Pakistan. To increase pressure on India and demonstrate to the Soviet Union that the US was serious about West Pakistan, Nixon authorized the movement of the *USS Enterprise* task force to the Bay of Bengal, and reiterated to Vorontsov—through Haig—that the White House expected a written reply to Nixon’s letter of December 6th. Furthermore, Nixon and Kissinger called in the Soviet Agriculture Minister, Vladimir Matskevich—then visiting Washington—to the Oval Office to convey to the Soviet leadership the seriousness with which American policymakers viewed the Indo-Pakistani war. Clearly informed by the memory of the Jordanian crisis of September 1970, both Nixon and Kissinger wanted to play it tough with the Soviets on India-Pakistan and save West Pakistan from dismemberment.⁴⁹ Both men also determined that forcing a change in Soviet behavior was worth risking the summit and even the backchannel itself.

In a brief afternoon discussion on December 6th about cutting off aid to India, Kissinger raised the late night meeting the previous evening and the receipt

of the Soviet oral note from Vorontsov. He explained, "I really read the riot act to him...about Soviet participation. And we're sending a note that you dictated today over to...Brezhnev." Nixon blurted out, "I don't know whether it'll do any good. Goddamn them, they haven't done anything yet...!" Alluding to the Jordanian and Cienfuegos crises a year earlier, Kissinger exclaimed, "My worry is, Mr. President, that...we may get into a summer 1970 situation if we don't show some firmness with them, now. Every time we've been tough with them, they've backed off."⁵⁰ The theme of playing it tough with the Russians clearly appealed to Nixon, who also counseled Kissinger to stay the course in the UN and to work with the Chinese. "Let's not separate from the Chinese at the UN," he told Kissinger, "That I will not do." Kissinger agreed. Kissinger again appealed to Nixon's sense of bravado: "It's a daring game, but we've always done well with the daring games." Nixon saw a Chinese feinting maneuver as a good strategy, and, with US backing, the Soviets would not dare to attack China: "It's a daring game, so, with the [US backing the] Chinese—[are] the Russians are going to attack China? Are you kidding?"⁵¹

To convey the message to the Soviets that Nixon expected a formal response to his letter of December 6, Kissinger had Haig call Vorontsov at 3:50 p.m. on December 8. Haig dutifully told the Soviet chargé that Kissinger "wanted you to have this message as soon as possible." In a direct rebuke to the Soviet oral response, Haig read, "the President does not feel a response at this time is necessary until he receives a response to his written communication, and he wanted it understood that the 'watershed' term which he used was very, very pertinent, and he considers it a carefully thought-out and valid assessment on his part."⁵² While Haig was communicating with Vorontsov, Nixon met with Henry Kissinger at the President's hideaway office in the Executive Office Building. Kissinger candidly assessed the sequence of events and determined that it was an earlier failure not to act toughly with Mrs. Gandhi and the Russians that allowed the war to commence: "The mistake was that we should have understood that she [PM Gandhi] was not looking for pretext; that she was determined to go. And secondly, we should have been much tougher with the Russians." Nixon asked, "Well, what could we have done?" Kissinger explained:

We should have told them what we finally told them last Sunday [December 5, 1971] that this would mark a watershed in our relationship, that there could be no Middle East negotiations if this thing would grow. We would have had to play it tough. And thirdly, we should have, once the cat was among the pigeons, when they moved on November 22, we had cut [aid] off, as you wanted, but we couldn't get the bureaucracy to do. We could

have cut off economic aid the first or second day, plus all of arms instead of waiting ten days and diddling around.⁵³

Vorontsov arrived at the White House on the morning of December 9th to deliver a letter from General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon. The Soviet leader placed the blame on the doorstep of Pakistan, for it was Yahya's crackdown in East Pakistan in spite of the December 1970 elections that had caused the exodus of refugees to India and had provided the spark to the proverbial fuse. Echoing American demands for a ceasefire—but not the withdrawal of Indian forces from East Pakistan—followed by a political settlement, Brezhnev stressed that a ceasefire would serve as a practical first step towards negotiation. Brezhnev asked that the US use its influence on Yahya to achieve that end and asked Nixon for a “calm and balanced approach.”⁵⁴ If Brezhnev had hoped for a “calm and balanced approach,” he was likely upset by Vorontsov's extremely urgent cable to the Soviet Foreign Ministry reporting a meeting with Kissinger when the chargé delivered Brezhnev's letter:

Kissinger said, as if speaking on his own behalf, that if India turns all its troops against West Pakistan “in the wake of East Pakistan” and tries “to secure a complete victory” over Pakistan, then the United States (“unlike our conduct with regard to events in East Pakistan, where the situation is rather complex and politically complicated”) would prevent a crushing defeat of Pakistan in that case, and to that end would even be willing to undertake steps of a military nature: “The Indians must not forget that the US has allied commitments with respect to defending Pakistan from aggression.”⁵⁵

Nixon took a hard line position when he received Soviet Agriculture Minister, Vladimir Matskevich, at the White House at 4 p.m. on December 9, 1971.⁵⁶ After a friendly introduction in which he recalled an earlier encounter in Moscow in 1959, the President pleaded with Matskevich: “I believe that you as one who is very close to the Chairman, and, of course, you as your top ranking representative...I want you to know how strongly I feel personally about this issue, and it may be that as a result of this conversation you could convey to Chairman Brezhnev a sense of urgency that may lead to a settlement.”⁵⁷ Intending that his guest serve as a one-way channel to pass along the ominous implications of an Indian attack on West Pakistan directly to Brezhnev, Nixon warned Matskevich:

The first requirement is a ceasefire. The second requirement is that India desist from attacks in West Pakistan. If India moves forces against West

Pakistan, the United States cannot stand by. The key to the settlement is in the hands of the Soviet Union. If the USSR does not restrain the Indians, the US will not be able to deal with Yahya. If the Indians continue their military operations, we must inevitably look toward a confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States.⁵⁸

Reviewing the meeting with the following day, Kissinger assured Nixon that the message that the US would protect West Pakistan would reach the Soviet leadership. The following exchange is particularly telling for Nixon's perception of the Indians and a sense that the Soviets were pulling the Indian marionette strings:

Nixon: But these Indians are cowards. Right?

Kissinger: Right, but with Russian backing. You see, the Russians have sent notes to Iran, Turkey, to a lot of countries threatening them.⁵⁹ The Russians have played a miserable game.

Nixon: So we'll do the same thing, right?

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: Threatening them with what? If they come in and what?

Kissinger: They'll do something. They haven't said what they'll do. But they'll settle now. After your conversation with Matskevich yesterday, they're going to settle.⁶⁰

Kissinger met with Vorontsov on the morning of December 10, and delivered a terse letter from Nixon to Brezhnev asserting that Brezhnev's proposals "concerning the political evolution of East Pakistan appear to be met," but that it would need to be followed by "an immediate cease-fire in the West."⁶¹ Kissinger allowed Vorontsov to copy the verbatim text of an *aide-memoire* from November 5, 1962, between then Pakistani leader Ayub Khan and US Ambassador McConaughy, in which the Kennedy administration reaffirmed previous assurances to "come to Pakistan's assistance in the event of aggression from India against Pakistan."⁶² As Nixon warned in his letter, if a ceasefire in the West did not take place immediately, the US "would have to conclude that there is in progress an act of aggression directed at the whole of Pakistan, a friendly country toward which we have obligations." Nixon continued to urge the Soviets "in the strongest terms to restrain India "from looking westward."⁶³

In New York on the evening of December 11th, Kissinger secretly met with Huang Hua, the PRC Permanent Representative to the UN and ambassador to Canada to coordinate Sino-American activities about the Indo-Pakistani War. Kissinger told Huang, "Incidentally, just so everyone knows exactly what we do, we tell you

about our conversations with Soviets; we do not tell the Soviets about our conversations with you.” Kissinger then raised a matter “of some sensitivity.” The US would share information with the Chinese about “Soviet dispositions on your borders” and, vaguely, “if the People’s Republic were to consider the situation on the Indian subcontinent a threat to its security, and if it took measures to protect its security, the US would oppose efforts of others to interfere with the People’s Republic.”⁶⁴

Kissinger called Vorontsov on the afternoon of the 11th to inform the Soviets that the US would “proceed unilaterally,” presumably at the United Nations, if it did not hear from the Soviet leadership. Vorontsov informed Kissinger that Moscow had dispatched the First Deputy Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vasily V. Kuznetsov, to India “in direct connection to whatever we have discussed here.”⁶⁵ Nixon and Kissinger worried aloud that an Indian attack on West Pakistan might provoke Chinese action in support of Pakistan against India, which, in turn, could escalate even further if the Soviets moved against China to support India. Nixon believed it would be “crystal clear,” “naked aggression” if India continued military action after East Pakistan was “wrapped up.” Kissinger explained that Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh had “refused to give an assurance” that India did not “have any territorial...ambitions.” Singh had vaguely mentioned “minor rectifications,” a codeword, in Kissinger’s opinion, that meant Southern Kashmir. Nixon remarked, “by God, the country [US] doesn’t give a shit [about India-Pakistan]. That’s the point.”

President Nixon realistically assessed the situation and saw the scenarios involving nuclear war for what they were—unlikely contingencies:

Nixon: Are we being over anxious on the hotline? No, we’re not. Basically, all we’re doing is asking for a reply. We’re not letting the Russians diddle us along, point one...And, second, all we’re doing is to reiterate what I said to the Agriculture Minister and what you said to Vorontsov. Right?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Does that sound like a good plan to you?

Kissinger: It’s a ... typical Nixon plan. I mean it’s bold. You’re putting your chips into the pot again. But my view is that if we do nothing, there’s a certainty of a disaster.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: This way there’s a high possibility of one, but at least we’re coming off like men.

Encouraging Chinese troop movements against India entailed risks, but Nixon saw them as more of a means of forcing Indian restraint in Pakistan. With US backing,

a Soviet attack on China in support of India was, in the President's estimation, unlikely:

Nixon: The reason that I suggested that the Chinese move is they talked about the Soviet divisions on their border and all that sort of thing. You know that the Soviets at this point aren't about to go ripping into that damn mess, having in mind the fact of their gains from the Indian thing...

Kissinger: The Chinese, well, we asked, but that's not the reason they're doing it.

Nixon: The way you put it, Henry, the way you put it is very different as I understand. You said, "Look, we're doing all these things, why don't you threaten them?" Remember I said, "Threaten, move a couple of people." ... Look, we have to scare these bastards...

Kissinger: My feeling is, Mr. President, leaving completely aside what we've said, if the outcome of this is that Pakistan is swallowed by India; China is destroyed, defeated, humiliated by the Soviet Union; it will be a change in the world balance of power of such magnitude...that the security of the United States for—maybe forever, certainly for decades—we will have a guaranteed war in the Middle East, then...

Nixon: The point is, the fact of the matter is I'd put [it] in more Armageddon terms than reserves when I say that the Chinese move and the Soviets threaten and then we start lobbing nuclear weapons. That isn't what happens. That isn't what happens. What happens is we then do have a hotline to the Soviets and we finally just say now what goes on here?

Kissinger: We don't have to lob nuclear weapons. We have to go on alert.

Nixon noted that the Armageddon scenarios were, however, hypothetical: "Well, we're talking about a lot of ifs. Russia and China aren't going to go to war." Kissinger disagreed, but Nixon pointed out that the timing was just wrong for a world war. The President counseled prudence: "Well, let me put it this way. I have always felt that India and Pakistan, inevitably, would have a war. And there can always be a war in the Mideast. As far as Russia and China is [are] concerned there are other factors too overwhelming at this particular point for them to go at each other."⁶⁶

Less than two hours later, Vorontsov called Kissinger with an "immediate reply" to the President's message:

The first contacts with the Government of India and personally with Prime Minister I. Gandhi...testify to the fact that the Government of India has no intention to take any military actions against West Pakistan. The Soviet

leaders believe that this makes the situation easier and hope that the Government of Pakistan will draw from this appropriate conclusions. As far as other questions raised in the President's letter are concerned the answers will be given in the shortest of time.

Vorontsov said he had not "been instructed to say this," but in his "personal capacity" he wanted Kissinger to know that Gromyko had returned from vacation, and the Soviet Ambassador to the UN had "been discussing with the authorities in delegation along the lines we discussed with the President," with "all kinds of guarantees."⁶⁷ Vorontsov repeatedly assured Kissinger that the US and USSR were in agreement, and that there was a chance for cooperation.

Meanwhile, another letter from Nixon to Brezhnev went out via the "hotline" at 11:30 a.m. The message was curt:

[A]fter delaying for 72 hours in anticipation of your [formal] reply...I had set in train certain moves in the United Nations Security Council...These cannot now be reversed. I must also note that Indian assurances still lack any concreteness. I am still prepared to proceed along the lines of set forth in my letter of December 10, as well as in conversations with your chargé d'affaires Vorontsov, and my talk with your Agriculture Minister...⁶⁸

The hotline message showed that the US had clearly taken a hard line with the Soviets and reflected the White House belief that India would attack West Pakistan—regardless of Indian or Soviet pronouncements to the contrary. The next day, December 13, the Soviets responded with a brief hotline message of their own, which stated that they were conducting a "clarification of all the circumstances in India" and that the message had been "in accordance with the confidential exchange of opinions."⁶⁹

The Conclusion of the Indo-Pakistani War and the Radford Affair

As soon as Nixon and Kissinger returned from a two-day summit with French President Georges Pompidou at the Azores, the intensity of the crisis ratcheted up even before the two had returned to American soil. Once Air Force One landed at Andrews AFB, members of the press scurried to report potentially groundbreaking news that the President might cancel the Moscow summit. The source of the news was none other than some comments Kissinger made on the plane that were supposed to be "unattributed," a journalistic rule of thumb known as the "Lindley Rule."⁷⁰ In violation of a gentlemen's agreement that went back to the 1950s, the

Washington Post attributed the comments to the National Security Adviser on the front page the next morning.⁷¹ The *Post* story distracted Nixon and Kissinger's attention from what would become a much larger problem inextricably linked to the India-Pakistan crisis: the Anderson leaks. An investigative journalist in the mold of turn-of-the-century muckrakers, Anderson later topped Nixon's much publicized "enemies list." In particular, Anderson's syndicated column of December 14th set in motion a fast-paced White House investigation.⁷² The investigation was led by John Ehrlichman and the White House "Plumbers," which had been assembled in the wake of the publication of the *Pentagon Papers* earlier that year.⁷³ The Plumbers investigation turned up some alarming news. Under polygraphic interrogations on December 15th and 16th, Yeoman Charles Radford revealed that the leadership of the US military had been spying on the White House through the JCS-NSC liaison office, and, more specifically, on Kissinger—the lynchpin in the backchannels to the Soviets—since November 1970.⁷⁴

By December 15th, the UN Security Council was deadlocked. Representing Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto eloquently argued that the Security Council's failure to act effectively legalized Indian aggression against Pakistan. Bhutto then stormed out of the session. Kissinger-Vorontsov exchanges later that day reflected differences of opinion over the UN deadlock: the US continued to support a UK resolution, while the Soviets pushed a Polish resolution. The real emphasis of the meeting was preventing hostilities in West Pakistan, coupled with a sense that a failure to maintain solidarity in the UN could reflect poorly on the status of US-Soviet relations.⁷⁵

The Nixon White House was clearly displeased that the US and the Soviet Union could not agree to jointly call for a simple ceasefire and withdrawal. Both superpowers had raised the stakes by dispatching naval forces to the Bay of Bengal, and rising tension in the backchannel exchanges reflected increasing antagonism. In a phone call with Kissinger on the morning of December 16, Nixon vented his anger with the Soviets over the course of events. If the Indians failed to accept a ceasefire, after the US had privately applied pressure to the Soviets, Nixon said, "Now in the event we are going to end up by saying to the Russians, 'You proved to be so untrustworthy we can't deal with you on any issues.'" Kissinger saw some hope for the Soviets pushing the Indians into accepting a ceasefire. "They still may get us a ceasefire," the National Security Advisor stated.⁷⁶

With much greater speed than the carefully crafted and symbolic actions of the Kissinger-Vorontsov exchanges, the meeting with Matskevich, the hotline messages, and the frequent phone calls between the White House and the Soviet embassy, the war in South Asia ended. On the afternoon of December 16, 1971, India accepted Pakistan's unconditional surrender in the East, and hostilities quickly

came to a close the next day after India announced a ceasefire in the West. Negotiations over war reparations, POWs, and the political settlement for East Pakistan—now the new nation of Bangladesh—lasted for several months. The lesson Nixon and Kissinger took away from the Indo-Pakistani conflict was that the US needed to act tough with the Soviets, which reinforced their earlier impressions of how to deal effectively with the Soviets.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Added to extant documentary collections, the surreptitiously taped conversations relating to US-Soviet backchannel and the nearly complete documentary record of exchanges between Kissinger and Dobrynin, Kissinger and Vorontsov, and Nixon and Brezhnev show the Nixon administration's desire to take a hard line with the Soviet Union and to compel the Soviets to restrain the Indians. Although Nixon and Kissinger contended that their actions had forced the Soviet hand and removed the Indian threat of dismembering West Pakistan, the case is still not closed and full confirmation is still not entirely possible in the absence of materials relating to Indian cabinet meetings, notes of the Soviet Politburo, and Indo-Soviet exchanges.

The critics stand on solid ground in arguing that Nixon and Kissinger personalized policy with anti-Indian zeal and sympathy for Yahya, although arguing that these prejudices defined American policy is not entirely accurate. Nixon's and Kissinger's behavior clearly remained within the rational actor model, based on perceived national interests. Initially, Pakistan served as the gateway to Sino-American rapprochement, and then US commitment to a shared ally was designed to impress the Chinese. Moreover, India's tangible support for the Mukti Bahini attacks into Pakistan alienated the White House. Nixon's and Kissinger's prejudicial background, if anything, confirmed their policy perceptions and resulted in more than one outburst captured for posterity by Nixon's taping system. Nixon's personal experience with the Indians and the Pakistanis, and with Gandhi and Yahya in particular, confirmed his views of Indian "aggression" and Pakistani good faith at facilitating the opening to China and accepting Indian concessions, such as allowing UN observers and keeping Mujib alive. Talk of "toughness," "bold action," and "coming across as men," reflected the White House sentiments about masculine virtues, while derogatory remarks about Indira Gandhi reflected the gendered speech of dealing with a very shrewd, tough woman who transcended supposed feminine vices.

On the charge of conflating regional issues with the global Cold War game, the critics of the Nixon administration have a stronger case. Nixon and Kissinger displayed amazing indifference to the fact that the Indians and the Pakistanis were

pursuing their own national interests on the Subcontinent. However, the critics' charge that the White House risked World War Three by its allegedly reckless actions is somewhat mitigated following a review of the fuller documentary record and the substance of US rhetoric and actions via US-Soviet backchannels. The messages to the Soviets primarily revolved around joint action at the UN and encouraging the Soviets to impose restraint on the part of their special ally, India. The backchannel exchanges show a steady—not reckless—progression of actions. At no point did Nixon increase the readiness status of US strategic nuclear forces. The movement of Task Force 74 for ostensibly humanitarian purposes, to aid the evacuation of American citizens from East Pakistan, was plausible, and the real reason—as a response to Soviet naval movements and as a signal to India—was not unjustified.

Nixon's policies on South Asia provided an ideal opportunity for Kissinger to centralize the policy formulation and implementation in the White House. Kissinger bypassed Secretary of State Rogers and the State Department with an impressive degree of self-promotion. Nixon did not completely bypass the State Department during the crisis and war, but he limited its role to presenting the public case at the UN and managing the refugee crisis. Nixon and Kissinger genuinely believed that India had instigated the hostilities and they believed that India had designs on West Pakistan incompatible with US interests. However, the only way to prove that one way or another would be for Indian archives to open to the extent which American sources have become available.

The situation on the Subcontinent ultimately defied the attempts of the superpowers to manage the crisis. The actions of Indira Gandhi, Yahya Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and Mujibur Rahman were ultimately more important in determining the final outcome than those of Nixon, Kissinger, Vorontsov, and Brezhnev. Nevertheless, the Nixon White House reliance on backchannels with the Soviet-Union (and tilting to China at the UN) was triangular diplomacy in action. As Jussi Hanhimäki has argued, the tilt towards Pakistan was, essentially, a tilt toward China. The policy actors on all sides were playing roles partially prescribed by Cold War divisions. The procedures they established would prove more useful as Nixon went to China and as the North Vietnamese launched the largest offensive since 1968 against South Vietnam.

 Notes:

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1. Nixon tapes (NT), Executive Office Building (EOB) Conv. No. 309-1, December 24, 1971, 12:00 – 1:37 p.m.
2. Nixon tapes, NT, Oval Office (OVAL) Conv. No. 699-1 between Nixon and Kissinger, March 31, 1972, 10:13–11:14 a.m.
3. Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Touchstone, 1978), p.530.
4. Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (hereafter cited as *WHY*), (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), pp.842-918.
5. Kissinger, *WHY*, p.856. Nixon famously wrote by hand on a memo, “Policy Options Towards Pakistan,” of April 28, 1971, on “Policy Options Towards Pakistan: “To all hands. Don’t squeeze Yahya at this time.” F. S. Aijazuddin correctly notes that the language did not originate with the Nixon, but rather in a cover memo from President, but actually with Alexander Haig, who wrote in a cover memo, “Henry has suggested...you could include a note to the effect that you want no actions taken at this time which would squeeze West Pakistan.” The cover memo is in Aijazuddin, *The White House and Pakistan: Secret Declassified Documents, 1969-1974* (Karachi: Oxford UP, 2004), p.241. The longer memo from Kissinger to the President in *Ibid*, pp.242–247; and *FRUS*, IX, pp.94–98.
6. Kissinger, *WHY*, p.856.
7. Kissinger, *WHY*, p.867.
8. Kissinger, *WHY*, 913.
9. Jack Anderson, *The Anderson Papers* with George Clifford (New York: Random House, 1973) pp. 205–269; Christopher Van Hollen, “The Tilt Policy Revisited: Nixon-Kissinger Geopolitics And South Asia,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 4. (April, 1980) pp.339–361; T. N. Kaul, *The Kissinger Years: Indo-American Relations* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1980); Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Power Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983) pp.444–479; Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-*

Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan revised edition (Washington: Brookings, 1994) pp.296–322; William Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998) pp.269–292; Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992) pp.371–376; Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, (London: Verso, 2001) pp.44–55; Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford UP, 2004) pp.154–184, 187–191; Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007) pp.325–368.

10. Anderson, *Anderson Papers*, p.205.

11. Aijazuddin, *The White House and Pakistan*; Roedad Khan, ed., *The American Papers: Secret And Confidential India-Pakistan-Bangladesh Documents 1965–1973* (Karachi: Oxford UP, 1999); US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as *FRUS*), v.I, *Foundations of Foreign Policy 1969–1972* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2003); *FRUS*, 1969-1976, v. XI, *South Asia Crisis 1971* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2005); *FRUS*, 1969-1976, v. E7, *Documents on South Asia 1969–1972* <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e7/index.htm>.

12. The bulk of the tapes on the lead-up to the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 and during the war itself have been publicly available for the better part of a decade. Aside from the transcripts in the two *Foreign Relations* volumes and the work of W. Taylor Fain, the authors have not seen any original research on the tapes related to South Asia. *FRUS* cited previously.. Also, W. Taylor Fain, “We’ve Always Done Well With The Daring Games”: The Nixon Tapes, The Indo-Pakistani War Of 1971, And The Early Travails Of De?tente,” conference paper (Dobbiaco, Italy: CD-ROM Document Reader; Machiavelli Center for Cold War Studies, 2002). We hypothesize that the logistical challenges to using these early tapes releases by the National Archives, such as the tapes being available only on relatively poor quality audiocassettes (versus Compact Discs) and access being geographically limited to the audio-visual room in College Park, MD, are the reason most scholars have invested finite research time on document collection rather than listening to and transcribing the tapes. Our website, nixon tapes.org, contains a digitized collection available to anyone with a web connection, with the hope that scholars and the public can more easily access the tapes.

13. Because Dobrynin was in the Soviet Union during the actual war, his backchannel duties temporarily shifted to the Soviet charge d’affaires, Yuly Vorontsov. US Department of State, *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, Introductions by Henry A. Kissinger and Anatoly Dobrynin (Washington, DC: GPO, 2007) Hereafter cited as *Détente Years*.

14. Geoffrey Warner, “Nixon, Kissinger and the breakup of Pakistan, 1971,” *International Affairs* 81, 5 (2005) p.1098.

15. "Samuel Hoskinson and Richard Kennedy to Kissinger," May 25, 1971, in *FRUS*, v.XI, p.146.
16. HAK Telcons, Dobrynin File, Box 27, and "Kissinger-Dobrynin Memcon (USSR)," June 10, 1971, *Détente Years*, p.374.
17. HAK Telcons, Dobrynin File, Box 27. Also, *Détente Years*, p.372.
18. "Kissinger-Dobrynin Memcon (USSR)," June 30, 1971, *Détente Years*, p.391. Also, Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp.224–225.
19. Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh officially signed the treaty in New Delhi on August 9. For an English translation of the text, see R. K. Jain, ed., *Soviet-South Asian Relations, 1947–1978*, v.1, (Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979), pp.113–116. We are indebted to Tanvi Madan for the "insurance policy" analogy.
20. Kissinger was likely referring to John Kenneth Galbraith, who served as the US Ambassador to India during the Kennedy administration.
21. NT, OVAL Conv. No. 557-1, August 9, 1971, 8:52–11:47 a.m.
22. "Kissinger to Nixon: Your Meeting with Foreign Minister Gromyko," no date, NPMP, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 71, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Gromyko, 1971–1972, NARA II.
23. "Memorandum of Conversation," White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 86. Also, NT, OVAL Conv. No. 580-18 between Nixon, Gromyko, Kissinger, Rogers, et al, September 29, 1971, 3:00-4:40 p.m.
24. NT, OVAL Conv. No. 580-20, September 29, 1971, 4:40-5:00 p.m.
25. Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p.242.
26. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, p.339.
27. Although Dallek is generally correct, he evidently confused some of his documentary sources. Dallek states: "According to Gandhi, during their [November 5, 1971] conversation, [Nixon] had Kissinger do most of the talking." Furthermore, Dallek refutes Gandhi's statements by stating, "The official transcript in Nixon's National Security files drawn from an audiotape is a dialogue strictly between the President and the prime minister." Dallek, pp.339, 340. The memo—not a transcript—apparently drafted by Kissinger, was certainly not drawn from an audiotape, which was unknown to Kissinger at the time. No notation on the memo suggests that the conversation was taped. See: *FRUS, South Asia*, E7, online: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e7/48213.htm> The conversation was in fact taped, but Dallek does not cite the conversation, which is: NT, OVAL Conv. No. 615-23, November 5, 1971, 11:21 a.m. -12:20 p.m. The conversation did not appear in either

print or electronic publication versions of *FRUS* on South Asia, and has never been published before.

28. NT, OVAL Conv. No. 613-15, November 4, 1971, 10:29 a.m. - 12:35 p.m.

29. For example, Raymond Garthoff writes, "On December 3 the Pakistani air force attacked eight Indian airfields in the region around West Pakistan, and Pakistani armored forces thrust into the part of Kashmir administered by India. This action opened the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971." *Détente and Confrontation*, p.298. *Détente and Confrontation*, f.n. 12, p.298. Robert Dallek entirely ignores the events of November 1971, arguing, "When a full-scale war finally erupted on December 3, the CIA could not say which country had initiated the hostilities. Nevertheless, Nixon and Kissinger blamed New Delhi." *Nixon and Kissinger*, p.341. Isaacson, *Kissinger*, p.374.

30. For example, at a WSAG meeting on November 12, 1971, Joseph Sisco said: "Indian strategy has been to continue the pressure on Yahya and to suck Pakistan in militarily so that the principal onus for starting a war would fall on Pakistan." *FRUS*, XI, p.506.

31. Isaacson, *Kissinger*, p.374. Yahya's cable is published in full in Aijazuddin, *The White House and Pakistan*, pp.364-366. Also, *FRUS*, XI, f.n.4, p.539.

32. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, p.214.

33. "Minutes of WSAG Meeting," November 22, 1971, *FRUS*, XI, p.532.

34. "Nixon-Kissinger Telcon," November 22, 1971, 12:45p.m., HAK Telcons, Chronological File, Box 12. Also quoted in *FRUS*, XI, pp.536-537.

35. *FRUS*, XI, p.537.

36. In his memoirs, Kissinger recounted his "first secret meeting with the Chinese in New York," Huang Hua, on November 23, 1971. Kissinger, *WHY*, p.889. A transcript of the meeting, prepared by Winston Lord, is included in "The Lead-Up to Nixon's Trip to China: US and Chinese Documents and Tapes," William Burr, ed., with Sharon Chamberlain, Gao Bei, and Zhao Hun," May 22, 2002, online: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc22.pdf> <accessed December 10, 2008>.

37. NT, OVAL Conv. No. 622-1, November 22, 1971, 3:51 p.m. - 3:58 p.m.

38. "Telegram from State Department (Washington) to Embassy in Pakistan (Islamabad)," November 28, 1971, 0101Z, *FRUS*, XI, pp.565-566. Also, OVAL Conv. No. 622-1, November 22, 1971, 3:51 - 3:58 p.m.

39. "Telegram from the Department of State (Washington) to the Embassy in the Soviet Union (Moscow), November 27, 1971, 0103Z, *FRUS*, XI, p.569.

40. Indian Prime Minister Gandhi spoke to her nation on December 3 1971 noting that the Pakistani Air Force had struck six Indian airfields and was shelling positions along the Indian-West Pakistani border. In response, Pakistan claimed it was

responding to “aggressive” Indian reconnaissance over West Pakistan. *FRUS*, XI, p.592.

41. “Kissinger-Nixon Telcon,” December 3, 1971, 10:45 a.m. in *FRUS*, XI, pp.593-594.

42. The minutes of the first meeting were among the leaked documents published by Jack Anderson, in which Kissinger famously said—and has been oft-quoted in news stories and histories ever since, “I’ve been catching unshirted hell every half-hour from the President who says we’re not tough enough. He believes State is pressing us to be tough and I’m resisting...He wants to tilt toward Pakistan.” “WSAG Minutes,” December 3, 1971, 11:19-11:55 a.m., *FRUS*, XI, p.597.

43. *FRUS*, XI, pp.596-604. Kissinger also convened the WSAG on December 4, 1971. DCI Helms noted how the Soviet Union had shifted its position from opposing an Indo-Pakistani war “to the conclusion that Moscow would not do much to try to halt hostilities.” *FRUS*, XI, fn 3, p.621. Also, *FRUS*, XI, pp.620-627.

44. “Kissinger-Nixon Telcon,” December 5, 1971, no time, HAK Telcons, Home File, Box 29. Also, *FRUS*, XI, pp.635-640.

45. “Kissinger-Vorontsov Memcon,” December 5, 1971, NPMP, President’s Trip Files, Box 492, NARA II.

46. “Kissinger-Vorontsov Telcon,” December 6, 1971, 3:32 p.m., HAK Telcons, Chronological File, Box 12.

47. “Nixon to Brezhnev,” December 6, 1971, *Détente Years*, p.532.

48. “Brezhnev to Nixon,” December 6, 1971, NPMP, NSC Files, President’s Trip Files, Box 492, NARA II. Also, Memorandum for the President from Henry Kissinger, December 8, NPMP, NSC Files, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger 1971, v. 8. Box 492.

49. In his memoirs, Nixon wrote of the September 1970 Jordanian Crisis: “However, one thing was clear. We could not allow Hussein to be overthrown by a Soviet-inspired insurrection. If it succeeded, the entire Middle East might erupt in war... Soviet prestige was on the line with both the Syrians and the Egyptians. Since the United States could not stand idly by and watch Israel being driven into the sea, the possibility of a direct US-Soviet confrontation was uncomfortably high. It was like a ghastly game of dominoes, with a nuclear war waiting at the end.” Nixon, *RN*, p.483.

50. NT, OVAL Conv. No. 630-2, December 6, 1971, 12:02 – 12:06 p.m.

51. NT, OVAL Conv. No. 630-10, December 6, 1971, 3:04 – 3:08 p.m.

52. “Haig-Vorontsov Telcon,” December 8, 1971, 3:50 p.m., *Détente Years*, f.n.3, p.533.

53. NT, EOB Conv. No. 307-27 between Nixon, Kissinger, and Mitchell, December 8, 1971, 4:20-5:01 p.m., *FRUS*, E-7.

54. "Brezhnev to Nixon," December 8, 1971, *Détente Years*, pp.534-535.
55. "Telegram from Vorontsov to the Soviet Foreign Ministry," December 9, 1971, *Détente Years*, pp.535-536.
56. Henry A. Kissinger, "Memorandum for the President," December 9, 1971. NPMP, NSC Files, President's Trip Files, Box 492, NARA II.
57. OVAL Conv. No. 634-12, *FRUS*, E-7.
58. "Nixon, Matskevich, Vorontsov, Kissinger Memcon: Memorandum for the President's File," Washington, December 9, 1971, *FRUS*, XIV, p.771.
59. The Soviets were likely protesting the tacit American encouragement that Pakistan receive military aid through third parties, such as Iran and Jordan. *FRUS*, XIV. Also, "Kissinger-Bhutto Telcon," December 12, 1971, no time, HAK Telcons, Chronological File, Box 11.
60. NT, OVAL Conv. No. 635-8, December 10, 1971, 10:51-11:12 a.m., *FRUS*, E-7.
61. "Nixon to Brezhnev," December 10, 1971, *FRUS* XI, pp.745-746.
62. *Détente Years*, p.538. *FRUS*, 1961-1963, v. XIX, South Asia, Document 191.
63. "Nixon to Brezhnev," December 10, 1971, *FRUS* XI, pp.745-746.
64. "Memcon Huang Hua, Ch'en Ch'u, T'ang Wen'sheng, Kissinger, Bush, Haig and Lord," December 10, 1971, 6:05 – 7:55 p.m., New York City-East Side, DNSA online.
65. "Kissinger-Vorontsov Telcon," December 11, 1971, c.a. 3:00 p.m., *Détente Years*, pp.539-540.
66. NT, OVAL Conv. No. 637-3 between Nixon and Kissinger, December 12, 1971, 8:45 – 9:42 a.m.
67. "Kissinger-Vorontsov Telcon," December 12, 1971, 10:05 a.m., HAK Telcons, Chronological File, Box 12.
68. "Nixon to Brezhnev," December 12, 1971, *Détente Years*, p.543.
69. "Soviet Hotline Message," December 13, 1971, NPMP, NSC Files, Box 492, NARA II.
70. William Safire, "ON LANGUAGE: Off the Record," *New York Times* (October 29, 1989) <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=950DE6DC1F3CF93AA15753C1A96F948260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all>
71. James M. Naughton, "Nixon May Review Trip Unless Soviet Curbs India," *The New York Times* (December 15, 1971) p.1.
72. Jack Anderson, "The Washington Merry-Go-Round: US, Soviet vessels in Bay of Bengal," *The Washington Post* (December 14, 1971) p.B15.
73. James Rosen, *The Strong Man*, p.169.

74. Len Colodny, "Excerpt of an interview with Admiral Moorer," January 27, 1987, online: <http://www.nixonera.com/media/audio/transcripts/moorer.asp> <accessed: May 7, 2009>.
75. "Kissinger-Vorontsov Memcon (US)," December 15, 1971, *Détente Years*, pp.552–553. "Kissinger-Vorontsov Memcon (USSR)," December 15, 1971, *Détente Years*, pp.553–554.
76. *FRUS*, XI, pp.837-841.
77. OVAL Conv. No. 652-17, January 20, 1972, 6:08 – 6:36 p.m., *FRUS*, XIV, pp.119-121. Also, "Kissinger to Nixon," December 16, 1971, *FRUS*, XI, pp.843–846, esp. p.845.